

## Aunt Cynthia Bray's Easter Decorations

By FRANK H. SWEET

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**A** NEW minister had come to slow moving, out of the way Spruce Hill, and with his coming had appeared a spirit of change and improvement. He was fresh from his theological course and eager with youth and love for the world. Hitherto the church had been to Spruce Hill a place of solemnity, only to be visited at required intervals and as a duty. Now, under the ministrations of this young pastor, it gradually came to them that duty could be approached from many directions, and not all of them were necessarily stony and narrow.

Among other innovations were the Easter sermon and church decoration. The new minister made the announcement one Thursday evening after prayer meeting and said that he hoped all would be present and that the ladies of the church would arrange for a tasteful and appropriate decoration.

After service the women stood about irresolutely, looking at each other with blank, questioning faces.

"I guess you'll have to excuse me, Mr. Kent," one of them said at last.



"THE VISIT TO THE MINISTER."

quietly. "I ain't got any flowers, an' besides, I don't know anything about decoratin'."

"Nor me! Nor me!" "Nor me!" came in rapid succession and in evident relief from the other women. "Tain't time yet for flowers to bloom."

"Can't we find a few vases and Easter lilies and narcissuses and perhaps some other white flowers?" asked the minister, with less confidence in his voice.

"All the houses in the neighborhood can't scour up white posies enough for a buttonhole bouquet," declared one woman, ingenuously. "As for Easter lilies, I ain't never seen one, an' narcissus I ain't even heard of. The idea of decoratin' a whole church this time o' year!"

"I've heard Mis' Bray speak of narcissus," said a woman reflectively, "she that was the florist's wife, you know. An', come to think, she's likely a master hand at this decoratin' business. She has spoke o' seein' big cities decorated with flowers."

"Who is Mrs. Bray?" asked the minister quickly. "Perhaps she can help me out with this. Curious I have not heard of her before."

"Oh, I don't know," dryly. "Folks sort o' die away from the world after they go into the poorhouse, Mis' Bray's husband was for gettin' on, so he went to the city an' learned the florist's trade. For a time he done well; then his business broke an' he died. An' his wife come back here an' lived up what little she had. After that there was nothin' but the poorhouse."

"Well, we will find her," eagerly. "Will you go with me, Mrs. Perry?"

"Why, yes; I don't mind if I do. Cynthia Bray was as much of a lady as anybody round."

The next afternoon the minister's buckboard stopped in front of the poorhouse, and he and Mrs. Perry alighted.

In answer to their knock a hard featured woman came to the door.

"Mis' Bray?" she repeated. "Oh, Aunt Cynthia, as we call her, is a good worker, so we keep her in the kitchen. I don't suppose she's had a visitor after five years. Won't you come in?"

They entered. Five minutes passed; then a little old woman, with a dejected manner, stole softly into the room.

"Did—did you wish to see me?" she asked tremulously.

Mrs. Perry sprang forward in quick forgetfulness of the immeasurable distance which lay between her special position and the poorhouse.

"Why, you poor soul," she cried sympathetically, "how old you've grown! My hair hasn't begun to turn yet, an' here your 'n is perfectly white!"

"It's been a long time since you and I were young," answered the old woman gently. Then she colored with sudden remembrance and drew herself up stiffly.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked.

"Come, Cynthia, don't talk that way," remonstrated Mrs. Perry. "You know farmers' wives are always workin'."

an—an—it's a good piece from our place to the—"—

"Poorhouse," said the old woman calmly.

"Well, yes, poorhouse," depreciatingly, "but never mind all that. I've bring the minister."

"I don't think I've had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Bray before," said the minister, rising, "and yet I've called here several times."

"No, we haven't met," acquiesced the old woman. "I generally stay in the kitchen."

"I must acknowledge this visit is mostly a business one, Mrs. Bray," he said, resuming his seat. "You see, I am planning to have the church decorated for Easter, but the ladies of my congregation assure me that such a thing is utterly impossible. I have come to you as a last resort. Can you help me?"

The old woman looked from one to the other with a sudden yearning in her eyes. Then a soft flush began to steal over her face.

"It isn't easy to decorate without anything to decorate with," she said tremulously. "In the city we used to have palms and Easter lilies and no end of ferns and delicate things to bank with."

"But there are the woods," suggested the minister. "I notice lots of pretty things on my walks."

"Yes, the woods are beautiful around here in the spring. I notice them from the kitchen window, and sometimes before any one is up I take short walks." Her hands were still trembling, but into her face was coming an expression which Mrs. Perry remembered to have belonged to her old days.

"Do you mean for me to take charge of the decorating?" she asked.

"Yes, but of course with plenty of help."

He turned hastily and glanced through the window. Something rapturous in the expression on the old woman's face made him lose command of himself for a moment.

"Well, I shall need help in gathering the decorations," she was saying as he turned back. "There will be things to cut and bring home and boxes and boards to build up for the banking. There are some bushes along the creek that I can fix up to look very much like palms at a little distance, and that dark moss below the ledge will make a beautiful bank on which we can arrange the early white flowers which are beginning to bloom on the hill sides. But there," breaking into a low, joyous laugh, which apparently frightened her, for she stopped suddenly and looked about in a scared, tremulous sort of way. "I was only going to say," she went on hesitatingly, "that I haven't seen the church yet. I ought to go there now and look around."

"Of course. We will take you there this afternoon," volunteered the minister, smiling.

"And you can have my horse and wagon every afternoon if you like," added Mrs. Perry warmly. "There is my boy Tommy; you can have him to drive you all to the your gathering in town."

The old woman's face was now absolutely radiant.

"It will be beautiful," she murmured, "like the world seemed when I was young." She was not thinking of the greatest joy, but of the beaten path of not being forgotten. God is good to have remembered me so kindly."

The minister gazed at her a moment, then turned again to the window. "There will be no failure in the church decoration," he remarked to Mrs. Perry.

Nor was there, nor in the beautiful thing that had come to the little old woman. During the decorating she was like a different creature. When it was all over the minister went to her impulsively and grasped both her hands.

"I cannot tell you how much you have helped me," he said earnestly. "The decoration has been a perfect success, and it is all owing to you. But there is another thing I wish to speak about. My housekeeper is about to leave, and I need some one to take her place. Will you come and look after the parsonage—and me, too, for that matter?"

So the beautiful thing which had come to her was not of a day, but was to last through all the remainder of her years.

### EASTER EVE IN ITALY.

On Easter eve the people of all parts of Italy play upon instruments and sing before the shrines of the Virgin Mother of Christ with the poetic idea of assuaging her grief for the death of her beloved Son. Italy pays great attention to the decoration of the churches, and the Easter decoration in Italy is probably more elaborate than in any other country. On Easter eve young men and women assemble at the churches and aid in their decoration, a collation being served on the completion of the piano work.

### Egg Smashing in Rural England.

Egg contests survive in many rural parts of England. A popular game is that of egg smashing. Eggs are pitted against each other in a shell breaking contest, the owner of the egg that cracks the other taking the spoils home in a bucket for an omelet. In Northumbria if a man asks a woman for an egg on Easter and is refused he may take off her shoes and keep them until she pays a penalty. If a man refuses the egg to a woman, she snatches away his cap and holds it for redemption by a money forfeit.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked.

"Come, Cynthia, don't talk that way," remonstrated Mrs. Perry. "You know farmers' wives are always workin'."

## The Easter Lilies at Christ's Tomb

LONG ago, as Easter emblems, bloomed the lilies, tall and white.

Pure and stateliest of flowers, gleaming with celestial light.

Clad, as if with prayer and fasting, pale with watching by the dead. Near a garden tomb they lingered. Low before it bowed the head.



TOUCHED THE SWEET, THE MYSTIC LILIES.

for the angels' silent fingers,  
As they softly waited there,  
Touched the sweet, the mystic lilies  
Lovingly, with tender care.

While the world in solemn stillness  
Watched the coming of the day  
Of that first that ancient Gaster  
When the stone was rolled away.

And when morning dawned resplendent,  
And on earth its glory shined,  
Pealed the lily bells in triumph,  
"Christ is risen from the dead!"

—Christian Morph.

EASTER EGG IN ITALY.

These are numerous designs pictured on the Easter eggs, but they are all artistically painted, and the cost of one wears a twelve dollar bill.

Times are not exactly as flush as they anted to be yesterday we took our rifle and killed four big birds for our wife to trim her hat with.

Those is just this about it. These Easter trimmings not only cover the ground, but certainly fill the bill.

We have been kept very busy of late. We are running an Easter millinery establishment in connection with our newspaper.

We have sold enough Easter eggs this season to pay off the mortgage on our home.

The Easter weather is so clear and beautiful you can see a bill collector approaching a quarter of a mile away.—Athens Constitution.

### DETAILS OF THE EASTER EGG.

The custom of Easter eggs is one of ancient origin, being derived from the Greeks and Romans, who employed eggs, and undeniably colored eggs, as accessories for their pagan festivals. At any rate magical powers have always been ascribed to eggs in times gone by, and Cesarius von Heisterbach, who wrote in the middle ages, tells many stories of bewitched eggs. They were said to be able to fly of their own accord toward the sun, and a certain celebrated egg was believed to have been laid by a rabbit, which egg when hatched produced a basilisk.

### AN APPROPRIATE HYMN.

Hasty or unwise selection of hymns has caused more than one minister serious mortification. A minister in an eastern city had charge of the Easter programme in the Sunday school of his church. Each child present was to receive an Easter egg, and when it came time for this part of the programme the minister rose and said:

"We will now sing 'Awake, My Soul, to Cheerful Lays,' after which the Easter eggs will be distributed." —Lipnickoff.

### EASTER MONDAY IN BULGARIA.

In Bulgaria young men and women meet on Easter Monday, congregating in the churchyard attired in holiday dress, and indulge in social games. If during these games a girl allows her handkerchief to be taken away by a young man this is a sign of a proposal and acceptance. The next day her parents send a jug of wine to him as a token of their approval.

### AN EGYPTIAN EASTER EGG.

A very rare specimen of egg decoration, as it was practised in Egypt, is shown in the Detroit Museum of Art. The etchings on the shell follow the same general design as do the paintings of men and animals recently found in Cairo.

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